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# RECONSTITUTION OF EMANCIPATORY SELF: A STUDY OF FEMALE PROTAGONIST IN THE SELECTED NOVELS OF JANE SMILEY

A SYNOPSIS OF PROPOSED STUDY

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## Introduction:

The present research work attempts to explore the reconstitution of emancipatory self of female protagonist in the selected novels of Jane Smiley.

Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper stated in the book i.e. *'Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender'(2014)* that if feminism is a response to the oppression of women, and if resistance and emancipation include living according to one's own lights, then autonomy is central to issues in feminist philosophy. Classically defined as self-determination, autonomy includes the ability to shape our own lives and to live authentically rather than being directed by external forces that manipulate or distort us.

According to this reference, the female protagonists in the novels of Jane Smiley want to emancipate with respect and dignity by resisting external forces of patriarchy and social ill wills. They are confused between 'what is just?' and 'how to respond?'. Gradually, they understand and realize the dilemma or even it may be said that they go through the identity crises and finally reconstitute themselves with emancipation. While emancipating they realize their existence, their struggle along with the care ethics to maintain their family relations and values and social culture.

'The Ethics of Care' is a normative ethical theory holds that moral action centers on interpersonal relationships and care or benevolence are virtues. The founder of Ethics of Care was Carol Gilligan, an American ethicist and psychologist. Gilligan was a student of developmental psychologist Lawrence

Kohlberg. Gilligan developed Ethics of Care in contrast to her mentor's theory of stages of moral development. The theory states that 1) Persons are understood to have varying degrees of dependence and interdependence on one another.2) Individuals impacted by the consequences of one's choices deserve consideration in proportion to their vulnerability.

Thus, it can be said that the female protagonists of Jane Smiley strive hard to emancipate themselves and others by following care ethics theory insisting an autonomy that motivate them to maintain family relations and social virtues.

**Life and Works of Jane Smiley:**

Jane Smiley is an American novelist who was born on September 26, 1946 in Los Angeles, California. She completed her BA (1971)in literature. After completing an MA (1975), she has been conferred with PhD(1978) from University of Iowa. She has worked as a Professor of English at Iowa State University from 1981 to 1996. She has taught creative writing at the University of California, Riverside, in 2015. She has good academic background and career graph in literary works with renowned awards.

Smiley published her first novel, *Barn Blind*, in 1980 and won a 1985 O. Henry Award for her short story "Lily". Her best-selling *A Thousand Acres*, a story based on William Shakespeare's *King Lear*, received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1992. It was adapted into a film of the same title in 1997. Her other literary works include novels, short stories, non-fiction books and young adult novels.

**Aims and objectives of study:**

The present research work aims at studying the select novels of Jane Smiley in the light of theory of 'ethics of care' and idea of emancipation and autonomy. In this context the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand the concept of autonomy and ethics of care.
- To analyze conflicts in family in the selected novels.
- To explore the search for self-identity and the idea of emancipation of female protagonists in the selected novels.

**Hypothesis of the study:**

Female protagonists in the selected novels of Jane Smiley resist ill wills, struggle for survival and ultimately liberate. They deal with the family relations and attempt to solve conflicts as well as seek autonomy and emancipation.

**Review of literature:**

G. Premasundari in her PhD thesis entitled *Transgression, Loss and the Reconstitution of the Self in the Selected Novels of Jane Smiley (2014)* explores the struggle of female characters for their survival, their resistance to ill wills or malpractice and finally their liberation from it by realizing their self.

**Rationale and significance of the study:**

The present study has importance for its interdisciplinary approach. It will focus on the concept of autonomy and a psychological concept 'Ethics of Care' which is coined by Carol Gilligan, an American ethicist and psychologist. It will also focus on social virtues and culture, family relations and a journey from resistance to emancipation of women.

**Scope and limitations of the study:**

The present research work intends to explore and analyze the selected novels of Jane Smiley from the perspectives of the autonomy and ethics of care under the title '*Reconstitution of Emancipatory Self: A Study of Female Protagonist in the Selected Novels of Jane Smiley'.* The present research is limited to the select eight novels and the analysis of the same will be based on both primary and secondary sources.

**Research Methodology:**

For the present study the researcher proposes to use descriptive, analytical, interpretative, and comparative methods. Similarly, the emphasis will be laid on the close reading of primary and secondary data along with the available criticism and theories of ethics of care and autonomy.

**Novels Selected for the Present Study:**

The following novels are selected for the present study.

**Barn Blind (1981)**

*Barn Blind* focuses on a horse-riding family, ruled by the driving ambitions of an autocratic mother. Her four teenage children who are bullied, coerced and loved into training for The Team, handle the burden of their mother's dream with varying degrees of success. At last the female protagonist realizes her sons' aspirations and gives more space to live their life independently.

**At Paradise Gate (1981)**

*At Paradise Gate* is about families and death and the deathlessness of families. Jane Smiley indicates that death is more than the loss of a life; it is an exposure of human fallibility and an acknowledgment of inextricable kinship. The sisters

are scared about the death of their father but mother support to survive in the society.

**The Greenlanders (1988)**

In *The Greenlanders*, Jane Smiley has written a fascinating historical novel set in fourteenth century Greenland, a richly detailed account of the mysterious decline and fall of an isolated Scandinavian culture. The female protagonists help others to establish the society again.

**A Thousand Acres (1991)**

Published in 1991 and winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1991 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* is a modernized retelling of the Shakespeare classic tragedy *King Lear*. While King Lear centers on the eponymous king and his three daughters as they vie for his kingdom. *A Thousand Acres* follows the story of an aging, widowed Iowa farmer, Larry Cook, and his three daughters—Ginny, Rose, and Caroline—as he decides to incorporate his 1000-acre farm and hands over joint ownership to the daughters and their partners. Caroline thinks independently and takes decision for the betterment of the family by keeping social virtues.

**Private Life (2010)**

Margaret Mayfield, the narrator, is the eldest daughter of a doctor in small-town Missouri. By the time she is 8, her two older brothers have died, and her distraught father has committed suicide. Her once sickly mother, now energized, moves Margaret and her two younger sisters back to her father's farm. Thus, she promotes her family members to be stable in family and society.

**Some Luck (2014)**

The story opens with the patriarch, Walter Langdon, walking his Iowa farm. It's 1920, and Walter, recently home from World War I, contemplates his first-born son and his "perfectly graceful" young wife, Rosanna. Walter's life is his farm and his family. The Langdons both come from farming stock — his English, hers German — and know constant work, much of it described here with the precise attention that grants labor its own grace. In social and political milieu, Rosanna and Eloise both sisters live their own life prestigiously.

**Early Warning (April,2015)**

*Early Warning* makes clear from its opening that it's a continuation of last year's "*Some Luck*," and, as its title suggests, it foreshadows disasters, outrages and triumphs to come in the lives of Walter and Rosanna Langdon's descendants. Although there is disasters and outrages, Rosanna supports her family to be stable.

**Golden Age (October 20, 2015)**

Jane Smiley's Last Hundred Years trilogy narrates the chronological history of one Iowa farm family, the Langdons, over five generations. In the process, it also tells the story of white middle America. In this novel, children go out into the world less connected and finally discover and reconstitute themselves.

**Tentative Chapter Scheme:**

**Chapter I** Introduction:

i) Life and Works of the Select Novelists
ii) Aims and Objectives of the study
iii) Hypothesis

iv)Review of Literature

v)Rationale and Significance of the study

vi)Scope and Limitations of the study

vii) Research Methodology

**Chapter II-Theoretical Framework: Ethics of Care**

The chapter will deal with the theoretical background of Ethics of Care and its some beliefs of the theory related with emancipation of female protagonists in the selected novels.

**Chapter III- Reconstitution of Emancipation**

The chapter will focus on the analysis of the autonomy and dimensions or axes of autonomy: self-determination, self-governance, and self-authorization.

**Chapter IV- Journey from Resistance to Emancipation**

The focus of this chapter will be on the social institutions like family, marriage, politics and conflicts raised in the life of female protagonist and their journey from resistance to emancipation.

**Chapter V- Conclusion**

The chapter will bring out certain conclusions on the basis of the analysis of the selected novels.

**Select Bibliography:**

**A) Primary Sources:**

**Books by Jane Smiley**

**Novels:**

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